

Study shows freeway hurts West Valley city's economy

By Doug Murphy
Staff Writer

According to a report released last week, land and businesses taken by the state for the construction of the Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway could have a serious negative impact on the city of Tolleson in the West Valley.

The economic impact study presented to the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team on Feb. 2 estimated that if the freeway were constructed through Tolleson, to connect with Interstate 10

and the existing Loop 101, up to 1,700 jobs and as much as \$1 million in current taxes, and \$10 million in future tax revenues could be lost.

For the tiny 6-square-mile city with an annual budget of about \$49 million, the impact could be significant.

For Ahwatukee Foothills, the loss of property tax and retail sales tax was estimated at less than \$5 million, a small fraction of the city of Phoenix's \$930 million general fund.

The study also estimated that the economic benefits associated with time and

resources saved through a reduction in traffic congestion thanks to the freeway could be as much as \$585 million for individuals and businesses Valleywide the first year the freeway opens.

The Citizens Advisory Team meets again Feb. 23 when it will hear reports on air quality and on estimated right-of-way purchase costs.

The team plans on selecting a potential route for the freeway in the West Valley at its March 30 meeting. Plans to select a route in the east, or Ahwatukee Foothills portion of the project, are on

hold until later this year or early 2007. Thus far, Pecos Road is the only identified route in the East Valley.

The freeway was planned in 1988 to connect I-10 in the East Valley with the interstate in the West Valley, by following Pecos Road, cutting through South Mountain Park before turning north to reconnect with I-10 between 51st Avenue and the Loop 101 interchange.

The reporter can be reached at (480) 898-7914 or by e-mail at dmurphy@aztrib.com.

Advisory team member fights for greater public interaction

By Doug Murphy
Staff Writer

Concerned that the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team is shutting out the public, a member has asked the team to allow the public to address the group during its meetings.

In the past, written questions from the public were read and, if possible, answered at the end of the meeting.

But in January the advisory team changed its policy from having the written questions answered at the end of each meeting to distributing the questions to advisory team members who could ask for more information or an answer if they want.

Last week, however, advisory team member Michelle Pulich-Stewart, representing the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, said the club opposes the practice of not allowing the public to ask questions and get answers.

"The Sierra Club is concerned that the process is shut-

ting out the public," Pulich-Stewart said.

But Laurie Pendergast, of Laveen Citizens for Responsible Development, said that everyone on the advisory team sits on other boards and groups where they report progress made by the advisory team and brings back concerns of the public.

She said that it would be impossible for the 24-member advisory team to accomplish anything if too many people were involved.

The Arizona Department of Transportation formed the advisory team more than four years ago as the state updated the original 1988 freeway plan.

It is made up of representatives from groups in the affected area, including chambers of commerce, village planning committees and homeowner associations.

It is not a public body, is not subject to open meeting laws, and limits public participation to writing questions.

Because the questions are often repetitive or statements in opposition to the freeway and not questions, the

advisory team decided to keep the new policy of distributing questions from the public but not answering them unless a member of the advisory team asks.

Representing Ahwatukee Foothills on the advisory team are: Rock Argabright, Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce; Laurel Arndt, Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee; Kris Black, The Foothills Homeowners Association; John Rodriguez, Lakewood Homeowners Association; Jim Estrogen, Principal, Kyrene de los Lagos Elementary School.